

I am glad to find that the ordinary stay at the House of Education has been extended to two years. I think this is a decided advantage, and I hope very much that ex-students, whenever they have a chance, will return every now and again to their old home, so that they may keep in touch with all that is going on there, and learn any new methods that have been introduced, keeping their own ideas from getting rusty, for I have seen many teachers starting off very gaily at first becoming dreary teachers after a little time, perhaps because they had not met with much encouragement from those whose children they are teaching, or from being out of touch with any kindred spirit. These same teachers, if they could return to the hive from time to time, would have fresh energy put into them. I should also advise those who can put by a little money for a summer holiday trip, not always to take it out in going to some English sea-side place, where often you have to pay a great deal to be very uncomfortable, but to go over the water either to France or to Germany, where, if you set to work the right way, you can live very moderately and be most comfortable. You will come home feeling refreshed and with plenty of things to think about, instead of the old ones you were so tired of, and it is surprising on coming back to harness, after a change of this sort, how the worries that seemed so bad will have all melted away. In teaching it must always be remembered there is much brain work, and if this useful organ has too much strain on it, it causes its owner to become irritable and useless as a teacher. Therefore I advocate for those who can take it thorough change. I feel confident more could take it if they made up their minds to find a way to do so. It may take a little contriving, but still it can be done, and I have seen the beneficial results.

I hope also that you keep up with all that is happening in the world and read a paper every day, that it may not be said of any of you, as it was when I asked a friend of mine how she liked her governess, "Oh, she is an excellent teacher—very good to the children, but takes no interest in anything outside the schoolroom; she is a very uninteresting companion, as she never opens a paper and knows nothing of what is going on." I should like to mention that several times, when travelling about either in England or Ireland, I have heard ladies mention that they have a "treasure" who is teaching their children. On enquiry, I have found the treasure was one of *our* students.

Hoping we may *always* have reason to be proud of our students,

I remain,

Your sincere friend,

EDITH M. ARNOLD-FORSTER.

Cathedine,

Burley in Wharfedale,

Leeds, June 1st, 1898.

## KEEP KEENNESS.

CUSTOM, convention, and tradition, these are the time-honoured supports of nine-tenths of our conduct in life.

Life is not long enough for every one to find out for himself a new way of doing everything, and most of us are rightly content to follow the practice of our grandmother in the art of sucking eggs. The use of conventional methods has the enormous advantage of saving time and labour. What is gained, however, may be, and often is, squandered without profit.

Those who carry their adherence to custom so far that they make no effort to understand anything of the principles upon which their acts depend become, at the best, machines. The shortcomings of a machine are (1) that it is not alive, and only life can impart life; and (2) that it is not easily adapted to varying circumstances. By following customary methods for the most part, time may be gained for studying some one or two important principles of our profession, either with the view of testing the validity of them or for the purpose of applying them with greater effect.

No one is more exposed to the temptation of doing his work in a perfunctory manner than the teacher. In the first place, the subject matter is hackneyed, and therefore wanting in the excitement which novelty supplies; and, in the next place, the progress of the scholars from day to day is so slow that it resembles "marking time," or travelling by a market train on a cross-country railway. The parents of children offer in many cases little encouragement to the teacher and no sympathy with the tediousness of the occupation. They are rather apt to think that there are some things children must suffer, as nature and custom direct. Children must, it is thought, have the measles, and must be taught whatever fashion has dictated as suitable for the schoolroom. When grown up, children will enjoy immunity from juvenile complaints, and be released from the tedium of the schoolroom and its conventional discipline and routine.

The atmosphere of the schoolroom, like the atmosphere of the workshop, is not a healthy one for spontaneous growth-development. Children are not allowed to grow like hedgerow elms or park trees, but must be clipped like yews into all sorts of fancy shapes which the gardener's art has observed for centuries.



Yet, the teacher who has made any preparation for taking up his profession has not promised himself such slavery to convention while he was under training. He, too, has looked forward to escaping the "idols of the schoolroom." He, too, has intended to enliven the routine of learning and to substitute living instruction for skeletons of science, geography, or history. It must be admitted that many who are disappointed of their hopes learn to acquiesce submissively in their disappointment. They had expected to climb rocks and mountains with dangerous but exciting risks. They find themselves marching over loose sand in a windless, stifling atmosphere.

There is great need of keeping up the keenness of youth as time passes by, and the blunting effect of general society wears away its edge. Exceptional efforts are necessary to avoid the dull, flat, profitless condition of the teacher who has lost interest in his work. We cannot by thinking breathe the air of the mountain tops as we cross the low, long levels of the fens, but there are ways of keeping the thoughts up to a high working level.

The first point to insist on is the value of studying some educational classic. Different people will prefer different books, but having selected the one which you prefer, read it through once a year and keep it in hand as a *vade mecum*. There are very few books that have been really epoch making in educational studies. I should name Plato's "Republic," Bacon's Works, Rousseau's "Emile," and Pestalozzi's "Leonard and Gertrude." One or other of these should be read annually.

Secondly, every teacher should commence a new subject, if not every year, then every other year. It does not matter whether the new subject be a language, a science, or an art. The value of the new study is that it keeps the teacher's mind fresh and receptive of new facts, and it also helps him to sympathise with the difficulties of the learner.

There are few people who cannot, by a judicious use of opportunity, find means to get help in commencing new studies. Thus much I have to say about keeping keenness, and as a result of it, I believe that in after life pupils will say of their teacher as Margaret Fuller says of one of hers: "All the dreariness that had hitherto been associated with the schoolroom was gone; the things he taught us were a part of his life; it was no longer drudgery to learn."

T. G. ROOPER.

## NATURE NOTE BOOKS.

YES, I know it is unwise to head my paper thus, if I wish it to receive the attention it deserves, for will you not impatiently turn over the pages and exclaim: "We know all about those already, those little details of teaching are but bubbles floating on the great sea of our education question, and we look to the students who are diligent enough to fill these pages for some of the divers' treasures." I dived for you, my dear girls, most honestly, but I confess not very far, for at the Conference this month I found myself frequently in deep waters and was obliged to hold on bravely to outward and visible things, obviously Nature note books, since twelve of them were being passed from hand to hand. A few halting commonplace sentences strung together on their behalf showed how much might have been said, but as there is no second chance of any oratorical display, I should like to make up for any injustice I perpetrated then in the pages of our little magazine. So please read and forgive.

Do you find that parents sometimes think the Nature work waste of time? Do not wonder at this; the reason is that they have not done anything of the kind themselves. You must begin at the beginning as a child does, before you can understand where the fascination lies, and there will be a few who never do understand, just as there are a few who do not care to play a musical instrument, or to write a story. Can you recall the intense satisfaction you felt as children when you had completed your first poem, or painted your first original picture? Ask the parents this, and if they answer yes, they ought to be able to find out the rest of the secret for themselves. For each of these books is (to a certain degree) a true picture of the mind of its creator; there is no need to read between the lines, for open on the pages lies a character, wide or narrow, lofty or low, self-reliant or dependent it stands unconsciously but truthfully revealed. It may be argued that this is a drawback, and that such dangerous mirrors had best be turned with their faces to the wall. By all means, if the satisfaction were only for those who look over the shoulder; but as a matter of fact it is the owner who reaps the benefit, and if he is anything of an artist feels the most gratification. The reason is simple. He has found a means of self-expression through the most beautiful medium in the world, that of Nature. Every human being has a desire to leave his "foot-prints on the sands of time," not because he is thinking of posterity but because he likes to see himself